DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 292 571 PS 017 253

AUTHOR Fink, Dale B.
TITLE Latchkey Children and School-Age Child Care: A Background Briefing. Policy Issues.
INSTITUTION Appalachia Educational Lab., Charleston, W. Va.; Wellesley Coll., Mass. Center for Research on Women.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Nov 86
CONTRACT 400-86-0001
NOTE 23p.
AVAILABLE FROM Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc., P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325 ($3.50).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Involvement; Definitions; *Educational Responsibility; High Risk Persons; *Latchkey Children; *Program Development; *Public Policy; *School Age Day Care; *State Programs
IDENTIFIERS Kentucky; Tennessee; Virginia; West Virginia

ABSTRACT

This background briefing paper synthesizes current thinking and practice on the issue of latchkey children and school-age child care (SACC). The paper defines the problem of latchkey children; reviews related literature and programmatic responses to the problem; reports responses of four southern states; and points out implications for policy initiatives. The term "latchkey children" refers to children in self-care or sibling-care during a significant portion of their out-of-school hours. The literature review focuses on the number of latchkey children, origins of the trend, research findings on risks of self-care, children's fears, boredom and other emotional effects, television as surrogate parent, self-esteem and susceptibility to peer pressure, school performance, sexual experimentation, and depression. The review of programmatic responses to the problem discusses attempts to get children into SACC and attempts to reduce risks to latchkey children. Qualities of good SACC programs are pointed out. Seven implications for policy initiatives are discussed, including the responsibility of educators, the need to involve many community sectors, sharing costs of interventions, needed state and federal legislation, use of existing professional expertise and community resources, diversity of solutions, and the relation between primary and back-up solutions. A brief bibliography of related readings is provided. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

POLICY ISSUES

Latchkey Children and School-Age Child Care: A Background Briefing

by Dale B. Fink
School-Age Child Care Project
Wellesley College Center for Research on Women

November 1986

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Marilyn Slack
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

POLICY AND PLANNING CENTER
Appalachia Educational Laboratory
P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325

Funded by:
OERI
OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENT
U.S. Department of Education

ED292571
PS 017253
BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Policy Issues are prepared by the Policy and Planning Center at the Appalachia Educational Laboratory in response to specific requests from state-level policymakers. The Center's purpose is to provide information to decisionmakers as they consider issues. The papers are prepared within a quick turnaround and synthesize current thinking and practice on the issue. They typically provide a definition of the problem/issue area, discuss what is known from research, review what other states are doing, and discuss implications for policy.

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) is located in Charleston, West Virginia. Its mission is to work with the Region's educators in an ongoing R & D-based effort to improve education and educational opportunity. To accomplish this mission AEL works toward:

- the improvement of professional quality,
- the improvement of curriculum and instruction,
- the improvement of community support, and
- the improvement of opportunity for access to quality education by all children.

Information about AEL projects, programs, and services is available by contacting the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Post Office Box 1348, Charleston, West Virginia 25325.

This publication is based on work sponsored wholly or in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education, under contract number 400-86-0001. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department, or any other agency of the U. S. Government.

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc., is an Equal Opportunity/ Affirmative Action Employer.

LATCHKEY CHILDREN AND SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE:

A BACKGROUND BRIEFING

Prepared for the Appalachia Educational Laboratory

Dale B. Fink, Project Associate
School-Age Child Care Project
Wellesley College Center for Research on Women
Wellesley, Massachusetts 02181

Copyright c 1986 by School-Age Child Care Project

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Latchkey Children: Definition of the Problem	1
A Review of the Literature	2
A Review of the Responses	6
Responses in the AEL Region: Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia	11
Implications for Policy Initiatives	14
A Brief Bibliography	18

LATCHKEY CHILDREN: DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

Who are "latchkey children?" And some related terms

Millions of children in the United States take care of themselves for some of the hours before and after school and on the days that schools are closed. From the observation that many of them wear their house keys on a string around their necks, these children have come to be called *latchkey children.* Generally, we are talking about children from the age of kindergarten entry through early adolescence, or approximately ages 5 through 13. There are some known instances of preschool-aged latchkey children, but this briefing will focus on the more common occurrence as it relates to the school-age grouping.

Closely related to the term *latchkey child* is the term *self-care.* Children who are not being supervised by adults are referred to as *children in self-care.* Also common to the vocabulary of this issue is the term *sibling care.* Generally, a child who is said to be *in sibling care* is one who is being supervised by a brother or sister 13-years-old or younger; in other words, by one who is himself or herself still a school-age child. The term *latchkey children* commonly embraces those children who are in both self- and sibling care during some significant portion of their out-of-school hours.

Why should leaders of educational and other institutions be concerned about latchkey children?

The following are the kinds of questions to which the growing phenomenon of latchkey children have given rise.

Questions about risks to children's health, safety and security: Do children left to fend for themselves during their school-age years tend to become victims of physical, sexual or psychological abuse by older children or adults? Do they get injured in household accidents? Do they suffer from exposure to bad weather or from poor habits of health, nutrition, and hygiene when left to make decisions about snacks, outdoor apparel, and other matters for themselves and for younger brothers and sisters?

Questions about risks to children's emotional development: Do children left to fend for themselves during their school-age years feel lonely, worried, or scared, and thus develop lowered self-esteem and/or various social adjustment problems? Do they tend to engage in premature experimentation with sex, drugs, or alcohol?

Questions about risks to children's social, physical, and intellectual development: Do children left to fend for themselves during their school-age years miss out on valuable opportunities for play, social interaction, structured recreation, and enrichment to which this age group has traditionally had access and which children in this stage of childhood have always needed?

Questions about risks to children's school performance and general level of achievement: Do children left to fend for themselves during their school-age years perform below their capacity in school or in other activities in which they participate?

Questions about risks to the community: Do children left to fend for themselves during their school-age years eventually engage in undesirable behavior, such as vandalism, petty street crimes, assaults on younger children, and other delinquent acts? Do they engage in behavior which leads to accidental death and destruction of property, such as house fires started by playing with matches?

Note that the first four questions pose concerns about the price that children themselves may pay for being left on their own. The fifth question poses a concern about the price a community pays for having latchkey children. Of course, indirectly, all the questions can be seen as indicators of costs to the community, e.g., an increase in child injuries would be borne as a social cost by a community.

These questions taken together define the parameters of the latchkey phenomenon as an issue that concerns educational leaders and other shapers of public policy. The various questions have often been assigned divergent levels of priority in accordance with the particular professional perspective of those approaching the issue. For instance, public health organizations, not surprisingly, have posed the first set of questions about children's health and safety. Psychologists have focussed more on children's emotional well-being. Educators have sometimes placed the emphasis on the effect on school performance. Law enforcement and juvenile justice officials have framed the issue in terms of risks to the community.

No matter how the issue is framed, it is generally agreed that an affirmative answer to even one of the numerous questions posed above is reason enough to define the latchkey phenomenon as a very grave problem for our society, given the millions of children who are currently involved in it.

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

How many latchkey children are there?

How many latchkey children are there? Reports the *New York Times* of September 16, 1985:

> Estimates of the number of children who face empty houses after school, commonly called "latchkey children," now range from 2 million to 15 million, and Census Bureau officials say a pending study is expected to put the number at 4 million. The number appears to be growing along with a rise in single-parent families and the number of women working outside the home.

(In November 1986, that Census Bureau Report was still pending.)

Estimating the number of latchkey children is no easy task, and that explains the wide discrepancies in existing estimates as noted by the *Times*. Part of the problem is definitional. How long and how often must children be on their own to be included in the count? Age is a factor in the definition: older children spending brief amounts of time on their own may not be considered latchkey children, whereas young school-age children might be so considered if they spend any time at all unattended. But there are no agreed-upon yardsticks as to how old is old enough or how much time in self-care makes a child a latchkey child.

A second problem in getting accurate numbers is methodological. Parents may be reluctant to reveal that they leave their children without adult supervision. Some survey results show large numbers of parents who state that they are employed full time outside the home and are also caring for their children. Some part of this can be explained by spouses who work opposite shifts and make other arrangements that allow full-time coverage of the home, but part of it clearly seems to be parents who are counting themselves as caring for their children simply by calling home from the office.

In any event, carefully designed local needs assessments are more accurate than national projections. A particularly thorough one conducted for the city of Madison, Wisconsin by the Madison 4-C's in 1984 found 26% of public elementary school students using either self- or sibling care.

What are the origins of this growing trend?

Why the trend toward greater numbers of children in self-care? All reports and commentaries on the rise of the latchkey phenomenon refer to the increased employment outside the home of mothers, whether married, never-married, or divorced, as the single demographic factor most closely associated with this changing reality. In 1947, only 18% of mothers with minor children were so employed. In 1980,the figure was 57%. The Washington, D.C.-based Children's Defense Fund projects that by 1990,85% of minor children will have mothers employed outside the home.

Maternal employment is not the sole factor connected to this phenomenon, however. Three others are identified in Thomas and Lynette Long's *Handbook for Latchkey Children and their Parents*:

- The demise of the extended-family household, with its multiple adult caregivers that were available to look after children
- The rise in the rate of divorce and increased child-bearing by never-married mothers
- The increased mobility of American society, leaving many more families without access to a network of close friends or relatives

What does the research tell us about the risks of self-care?

What does the latchkey experience mean for school-age youngsters and what evidence is there about the risks they face? These are questions that are being answered in the literature both anecdotally and through the gathering of quantitative data.

Anecdotal evidence

Children's fears

In 1984, children were invited to write to the language arts magazine *Sprint*, published by Scholastic, Inc., in New York City, in response to this theme: "Think of a situation that is scary to you. How do you handle your fear?" The readership of this magazine includes fourth, fifth, and sixth graders from all over the country, and the exercise was designed purely as a way of stimulating children to practice their writing. The editors were stunned to discover that nearly 70% of the 7000 letters that poured in dealt with the fear of being home alone, mostly while parents were working.

Boredom, loneliness, tears

Telephone "warm-lines" have been established in numerous communities in recent years to offer advice and reassurance to children who are home alone. "PhoneFriend" of State College, Pennsylvania, which has assisted groups in starting these services all over the country, also tracks the types of calls it receives. Of the 1370 calls received during the first year of operation, 60% were classified as "just want to talk" or "bored," 19% were "lonely," and 15% were "scared," "worried," or "sad" or "crying."

Television as surrogate parent

Of a sample of 709 children who responded to a 1984 *Working Mother* questionnaire about after-school care arrangements for children whose mothers worked, the highest-rated activity was watching television. The particular show most often mentioned was *General Hospital*--mostly by girls over the age of 10 who "generally found the male characters to be more interesting and exciting than the female characters."

Quantitative evidence

Elevated fears

A 1981 study by Long and Long of 85 black parochial school children, grades one to six, in Washington, D.C., equally divided by sex, showed elevated levels of fear among latchkey children as compared with children who received continuous adult supervision while their parent(s) worked. One out of three self-care children and one out of five sibling-care children reported high levels of fear. Also, 40% of the self-care group and 26% of the sibling-care group reported being troubled by bad dreams. In contrast, the adult-care group experienced much lower levels of fright and of bad dreams.

A 1982 study by Galambos and Garbarino of fifth- and seventh-grade children in a rural setting, however, found lack of adult supervision did not lead to elevated levels of fear. Thus it may be that urban settings and younger children tend to correlate more readily with elevated levels of fear.

Self-esteem and susceptibility to peer pressure

A 1985 study by Rodman *et al* of 96 fourth- and seventh-grade children in North Carolina found no statistically significant differences between the latchkey

children and the adult-supervised children in respect to two psychological scales measuring self-esteem and perceived locus of control.

A 1986 study by Steinberg of 865 ten to fifteen year olds in Wisconsin found that the further children are removed from adult supervision, the more susceptible they are to pressure from peers to engage in negative behaviors. Thus those most susceptible of all were the latchkey children who did not go home but were "hanging out" in the neighborhood after school. Steinberg also questioned the relevance of using the kinds of measures employed in the Rodman study mentioned above. He comments that such psychological measures of personality are relatively stable and suggests that "further research on latchkey children should focus more on consequences in the domain of behavior than in the domain of personality."

School performance

A 1972 study by Woods of 108 low-income black fifth graders in Philadelphia found marked deficits among girls who were unsupervised after school in cognitive functioning, personal and social adjustment, and self-concept, as compared to girls who were supervised by parents or other adults. (There were not enough unsupervised boys in the sample to make similar comparisons.)

A 1975 Baltimore study by Entwisle found that children who attended an after-school program gained in self-esteem, improved their attitude toward school, and improved their grades in reading and math over a six-month period. The results showed this group doing significantly better than a comparison group not receiving program services. (It is not known whether the comparison group were latchkey children or were supervised at home.) Plans are presently underway to replicate this study and conduct it longitudinally over a period of three years.

A 1980 study by the former principal of a magnet school in Raleigh, North Carolina, documented significant improvement in reading and math scores for children attending the extended-day program as opposed to their peers who did not attend.

A 1985 study by Vandell and Corasiniti of 349 third graders in a middle-class Dallas suburb found no significant differences between children in self-care and children in adult care with respect to work/study skills, peer relations, or independence. However, the researchers have acknowledged that if the effects of being a latchkey child are cumulative, and these third graders have just begun their self-care experience, it may simply be too early for such differences to manifest themselves.

Sexual Experimentation and Depression

Long and Long recently completed a study of 362 parochial school students in Washington, D.C. and suburban Maryland, in grades seven to ten. As published in the *Washington Post* of November 29, 1985, the study found children using some of their time at home alone while parents worked to experiment with sex. While 15% of children living in households containing two adults reported engaging in sexual intercourse or heavy petting, involving some nudity, in the home during after-school hours, the figure rose to 40% for those living in one-adult households. The Longs found that, most commonly, such sexual activities took place in the homes of the girls.

While the study findings will not be published until some time in 1987, the Longs have stated in public workshop presentations that a significant proportion of the latchkey adolescents they interviewed also scored "clinically depressed" on a measure of depression which was embedded in their survey.

A REVIEW OF THE RESPONSES

In the 1984 book *School's Out--Now What?* by Joan Bergstrom of Wheelock College in Boston, it is stated that "out-of-school time" comprises 80% of a child's waking hours in an average year. She then adds this commentary:

> Some people might consider school the central fact of a child's life, and all other time just filler. But school was never intended to "do it all." In fact, there are reasons to believe that children's out-of-school hours may actually be even more significant than their in-school hours. For example, children's out-of-school lives seem to have a direct bearing on how children perform in school. Moreover, the effects go beyond the immediate. The way this time is spent...influences not only the child's life, but also his or her life as an adolescent and adult.

While debate continues about the numbers of school-age children caring for themselves when school is not in session, and the researchers continue to design studies which will more accurately assess the long-term risks of such arrangements, communities across the United States, perhaps implicitly understanding the urgency of the needs of school-age children as captured so elegantly by Professor Bergstrom, are developing a multiplicity of responses to the latchkey phenomenon. From the grass-roots level to the offices of large national organizations concerned with children and youth to the corridors of Congress and state legislatures, action is underway. Essentially, all these actions fall into two categories:

- Those designed to reduce the number of children in self-care by creating options in which various models of supervision are available before and after school and at other times when schools are closed but many parents are working

- Those which take as a given that many children will remain in the latchkey situation and therefore attempt to provide support and education that are designed to reduce the risks for such children

Getting children into school-age child care: the primary solution

What is meant by school-age child care, or SACC? Almost any program which serves children in the years from kindergarten through early adolescence during the full range of hours and days that schools are traditionally closed. These programs do not all call themselves school-age child care; indeed many shun

the term, as indeed nearly all children over the age of eight tend to shun anything that sounds like "child care" or "day care" as babyish. But regardless of what they call themselves, those addressing the issue would do well to see a whole range of out-of-school organizations and programs as part of the vast patchwork that those in the forefront of this issue label SACC.

These would include but not be limited to the following:

- Extended school-day programs
- Home-based child care or "family day care providers" who receive children before and/or after school
- Park and Recreation Department programs which enroll children for specified periods of time and do not simply provide drop-in supervision to whomever shows up
- Arts centers, cultural centers, and ethnic minority centers which run daily after-school activity programs
- Youth-serving organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of America which have converted from a drop-in to an enrollment situation
- Private or public recreation centers which run after-school or summer programs
- YMCA, YWCA, and other organizations which have arranged to lease or receive free space in public schools to operate programs during times when children are dismissed from school
- Day care centers for preschool children which have expanded to include youngsters of school age
- Parent groups that incorporate themselves in order to operate such programs
- Programs initiated by community education departments in the public schools
- Summer camps which have extended their traditional hours to accommodate the needs of employed parents

Qualities of good SACC Programs

There are examples from around the country of wonderful programs in any of the categories of programs on the above list. It goes without saying that there also exist inferior programs within every category. Neither the administrative auspice nor the particular managerial model can be taken as a certain indicator of whether a particular program is of high quality. It cannot be assumed that just because a public school district is running a SACC program, that that makes it a superior program. Nor can it be said that Aunt Betty's Daycare Home across the

street from the school is necessarily an inferior program, simply because we know that Aunt Betty never went to college and has no access to a mimeograph machine.

By what criteria, then, do we assess the quality of SACC programs? *School-Age Child Care: An Action Manual* (Auburn House, 1982) summarized three years of research on existing programs across the United States, including many site visits by the staff of the Wellesley College School-Age Child Care Project. In the course of this research, it was discovered that the best programs, the ones which parents were happiest to pay for, children were happiest to attend, and educators and child development experts recognized as most appropriate, had certain common elements, regardless of where they were housed or who was administering them. Following is a shortened form of a section of the *Action Manual* titled, "Basic Program Elements":

- Balance the day's activities so that there are structured and unstructured times, teacher-directed and child-initiated experiences, and a range of activity options
- Capitalize on the interests of the children
- Use the community as much as possible
- Agree upon and communicate clear, consistent expectations and limits to children
- Capitalize on opportunities for informal, social learning
- Build upon the special talents and interests of staff
- Allow for spontaneity

In the past year, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed a National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, with a well-organized and systematic approach to assessment of quality in all child care and early childhood programs nationwide. Though it will only offer accreditation to centers serving children up through age 8, its 10 validation criteria are certainly relevant to all SACC programs. They overlap somewhat with the above list from the *Action Manual*, but add such additional categories as these:

- staff qualifications and development
- efficiency of administration
- sufficiency of staffing
- a physical environment set up to foster optimal growth and development
- health and safety
- staff-parent interaction

Underscoring the statement that good quality programs fall into a wide variety of administrative models is evidence from the beginning of the NAEYC ac-

creditation process. The first four SACC programs in the country to successfully pass through the rigorous and time-consuming validation and receive their accreditation (valid for three years) included one private, nonprofit group in Oak Park, Illinois, operating in both public school space and in community space; a two-site program run by the city of Santa Fe Springs, California; a church-housed independent nonprofit program operating in Seattle, Washington; and the County-run program in Fairfax County, Virginia, which operates SACC in 57 different public school facilities.

We have heretofore identified in the abstract the kinds of criteria that make for a quality SACC program. But what does it mean, concretely, to capitalize on children's interests, to make maximum use of the community, to offer a combination of structured and unstructured time, etc.? Are real SACC programs actually being conducted by these precepts or are these just pleasant-sounding phrases that enhance the appearance of the parental handbook?

The answer is that all across the country, there are many positive examples of these concepts. Let us offer a number of brief illustrations:

In Nashua, New Hampshire, the public schools provided the space. The local adult education center acted as the fiscal agent. The County Extension Service (4-H) associated with a local university developed the curriculum and hired the staff.

In western North Carolina, senior citizens have been recruited as volunteers to become caregivers for would-be latchkey children, in their own homes as well as in community centers and public schools. Training and start-up assistance is provided by Project AgeLink, which operates out of Western Carolina University. The caregivers are encouraged to share their knowledge of crafts, baking, story-telling, gardening, and other interests with the school-age children.

In a school-based after-school program in Southern California, children in the older kids' program, grades four to six, were one day discussing elections and how it was that different countries had different forms of government. They decided, with the support of the SACC teaching staff, to hold a group discussion and form their own self-government. The students decided on a name for their town, and soon elected a mayor, a treasurer, and a town council. The council passed laws, and the treasurer was authorized to collect fines (such as a nickel) for the breaking of certain laws. The staff helped the children conduct fundraising events, such as bake sales, and the expenditures of such revenues were determined by the council. There were days the children wanted only to attend to their town business, and teachers simply stood by and offered support. On other days, however, the children were bored with their town and needed the staff to offer them a choice of activities, such as crafts, sports, and cooking.

In Shoreview, Minnesota, a husband and wife, homebound because of the exigencies of raising an autistic son, remodelled what used to be their garage into a licensed group day care center for 20 school-age children. There they offer chess tournaments, use of a video camera, science experiments, reading, quiet time, special guest visitors, field trips, monthly service visits to a local nursing home, and their annual "Goofball Olympics," amidst a very family-like atmosphere within walking distance of both a public and a parochial school.

These examples are not chosen because they are extraordinary. There are many fine programs successfully serving school-age children by integrating a creative approach to available resources with an understanding of children's developmental needs.

Don Hudson, principal of the Eakin Public School in Nashville, Tennessee, which has housed the parent-initiated, nonprofit Eakin Care Program for more than a decade, described the aims of that program this way:

> I didn't and they (the parents) didn't want this program to be an extension of the school day. Nor a babysitting service. It was to be instead a place where stimulating activities would take place, and where part of what the kids were learning was how to make choices. When school lets out, one kid wants to flop down and do nothing for a while, another wants to go to a quiet place and do homework. Later on, maybe they both want to get involved in a structured activity or learn a new skill. (Interview in *SACC Newsletter*, April 1985)

Across the country, a consensus is emerging among professionals who work in SACC programs. In the spirit of Hudson's comments, that consensus is that good SACC programs are neither, strictly speaking, "just more education," or "just day care." They are integrated environments which provide a developmentally appropriate curriculum that address the needs of the whole child, depending on the particular age being served. Neither intellectual needs, emotional needs, physical needs, nor social needs are given preference or primacy. All are considered important, and all are respected in the design of the schedule, the choice of the activities, and the hiring of the staff.

Reducing the risks to latchkey children: some back-up solutions

Local communities have developed a variety of alternatives for school-age children because the needs and resources of individual families and neighborhoods vary greatly. For many school-age children, the option of choice is a formal, adult-supervised child care program. There are instances, however, where the age and maturity of the child, the safety of the home and the neighborhood, and the quality of parent-child communication permit an acceptable self-care or sibling care arrangement. In other instances, parents may recognize that a supervised program would be the best choice, but in the absence of financial resources, or because of the unavailability of local programs, they may select self-care as the only realistic alternative. In these instances the existence of supportive services that seek to assist in developing a safe and healthy self-care situation be be of great value.

Such supportive efforts include:

- educational materials and curricula
- telephone "reassurance-lines"
- block parent programs

Educational curricula, in the form of books, films, brochures, and workshops, have been developed to provide information for both parents and children involved in a latchkey experience. Some have been created specifically for chil-

dren at home alone, while others fall into the more general category of prevention-oriented education to which all children at the elementary school level are being increasingly exposed. Only one, the "I'm in Charge" curriculum of the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse, has been given a legitimate field test with pre-tests and post-tests in various localities to determine whether the information was truly and accurately remembered by those involved--and its field test proved by no means definitive. Thus educators and others must be careful about placing too much confidence in the teaching of self-care and "survival skills" courses of study as a solution to the latchkey problem.

A growing number of communities have widely publicized telephone numbers where children home alone can call for reassurance. These are often referred to as "warm-lines." Volunteer phone counselors are trained to provide a friendly voice and occasional advice. They are not intended to provide a substitute for supervision, but to fill gaps for certain children who may be all right on their own but who need a caring adult to speak to when they are unable to speak to a parent. Some of these services keep a count of the calls they get by age and make the information available to those who are attempting to document the need for more supervised options for children as well.

A third form of support which does not involve a school-age child care program is the block parent program. Modelled on the concept of CrimeWatch or BlockWatch programs,which have been used to reduce crime in many neighborhoods, these programs use trained volunteers who make their homes available during the after-school hours in emergency purposes and pledge to be there on specific days. In Detroit, where such a program was started by the PTA, an official window sign was designed to denote the block parent in a particular neighborhood. The programs are not designed to address the day-to-day needs of children after school, but simply to reduce the possibility of serious trouble befalling a child.

RESPONSES IN THE AEL REGION: VIRGINIA, TENNESSEE, KENTUCKY, WEST VIRGINIA

The responses to the latchkey phenomenon in the four AEL states to date are consistent with the pattern in the rest of the country. They include the development of school-age child care programs and also some of the back-up responses mentioned earlier. However, of the four states, only Virginia, especially the northern part of the state, can be said to be well ahead of most of the United States in the proliferation of school-age child care. Tennessee appears to be about average, Kentucky slightly below average in current level of development. West Virginia has experienced remarkably little growth in this area.

Virginia

The SACC programs in Fairfax County and Arlington, Virginia, have been described as models in past publications of the Wellesley College School-Age Child Care Project. The former is administered by the County while the latter is administered directly by the school district. Administration by school districts of such programs other than in Arlington has since been forbidden by the legislature in order to protect the interests of private child care providers. However, information recently gathered from providers for the Department for Children's 1987 Day Care Plan indicates near-unanimous support for school involvement in the issue.

Three other areas, including Richmond, also now have large-scale SACC systems. Some schools are offering what they call "enrichment" programs but which effectively address the child care needs of families of employed parents as well. A family day care home check-in program for ten- to fourteen-year old children has been piloted by two organizations in the northern part of the Commonwealth.

There are a number of telephone-reassurance lines around the state. A committee of the Department of Education wrote a brochure called, "Is Your Child A Latchkey Child?" and distributed it to all elementary school children during the past year. It contained information to aid parents determine if their children could handle self-care and ideas on how to make self-care work. The same committee distributed a handbook describing various models of SACC and ideas on how to bring public and private sector leaders and organizations together in a given community to generate more options for families.

In spite of this level of activity, the findings of the Department for Children are that existing levels of school-age child care are far outpaced by the growing need. For the 1987 Day Care Plan, which has made school-age the prime focus, the Department surveyed parents in all 22 planning districts. As many as 85% of parents surveyed in some districts answered that there was a need for more school-age child care; the lowest tally in any district was 49% indicating that current options were inadequate.

Tennessee

The Tennessee legislature passed an enabling measure in 1978 to allow schools to conduct before- and after-school care programs if they chose. Since then, growth has been slow but steady in the major population centers of the state, with very little development in the rural areas.

Four counties in the Nashville area have SACC programs in the schools run by the YMCA. The YMCA is also playing a role in developing SACC, both in its own community facilities and in schools in the Chattanooga and Memphis areas. The YWCA is playing a smaller role. Churches are also housing a large number of after-school programs.

The Eakin Care Program in Nashville has been described in previous publications of the Wellesley College School-Age Child Care Project as a national model. This program was initiated in the early 1970's by the school's parents after the president of the PTO chapter received numerous calls from mothers and fathers who were desperate for a solution to their child care problems. Parents designed the program, formed a nonprofit corporation, negotiated for space and custodial arrangements with the school, and hired the staff.

Since then, most Tennessee SACC programs in the schools have not been administered by parents but by nonprofits such as the Y's or by the school districts themselves. Knoxville was one of the first districts to offer programs under its own administration.

In Murfreesboro, a very elaborate model has been piloted. One school building has been opened five days a week year-round from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. The district pays for a coordinator out of its own funds and the balance of the budget is drawn from parental fees. The program is oriented toward enrichment, with a variety of options in music, fine arts, and other areas. The hope is to eventually integrate such resources as 4-H, scouting organizations, and music and dance instruction into the program. The availability of students from Middle Tennessee State University who fulfill their practicum requirements by teaching in the SACC program (and get paid for it) are part of what makes this model work. The School Board has now voted to open another school on a similar schedule soon and to open all seven elementary schools by the fall of 1987.

Kentucky

A recent survey conducted by the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction brought surprising results. Those in the state capital in Frankfort expected to find that only three or four school districts out of 180 had any SACC programs. Instead, they identified 17.

In the Louisville area, it is the YMCA that is the most important leader in providing SACC, both in school facilities and its own sites. In smaller cities such as Lexington, it is private day care centers that are most active. In Bowling Green, the community education arm of the schools has taken charge of the programs. There is not a great deal of church involvement in caring for the school-age group after school, although the early childhood department of the University of Kentucky is conducting a laboratory-style SACC program that is housed in a church.

The office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is also developing a curriculum to be made available to all students, grades K-12, on the prevention of physical, sexual, and other forms of abuse. This is not conceptualized as directly related to the latchkey/SACC issue but involves some of the same state personnel.

West Virginia

There is very little activity in the development of SACC in West Virginia. In Charleston, two elementary school sites launched after-school programs in the fall of 1986. Regional Educational Service Agencies,which assist small school districts in supplementary areas,report that superintendents have not so far established the latchkey problem as a priority area.

The Department of Education recently completed an abuse prevention curriculum with a focus on personal safety, to be made available for use with all students, grades K-12.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY INITIATIVES

POLICY IMPLICATION #1: Educators who choose to ignore the circumstances facing children outside the classroom do so at peril of failing to meet the objectives they wish to achieve inside the classroom.

The national Parent Teacher Association described the latchkey phenomenon in the April 1985 issue of its journal *PTA Today* as "a growing crisis in the care and protection of America's children."

This crisis only deepens as the assumptions on which the scheduling practices of school districts have been based correspond less and less to the social realities of family life in this country in the 1980's and beyond. Educators have always known that someone needed to be there during those precious hours after the student left the classroom--and certainly on the days that the classrooms were not open. Someone needed to be there to provide nurturance, individualized attention, supervision, help with homework, and general moral guidance, among other things. The traditional presumption was that that someone would be Mother.

But Mother is not home at 3:00 in the afternoon in most American households in which school-agers reside. She is employed elsewhere and her income is vital to the maintenance of the home, whether she is the sole earner or half of a dual-earner household. Not only that, but she may have to leave the home in the morning long before the children are expected for the opening school bell. And she certainly will not make a good impression on her supervisor if she tries to take off work every time there is a teacher inservice day, a snow day, a broken boiler at the school, or a school holiday that does not apply to most businesses.

All of this would not be so bad if Mother's mother were available. Or if Father, in those households that have one, had adjusted his work and family lifestyle to correspond to the changed circumstances. But Grandma isn't around. She either has a job herself or lives too far away to help out. Nor is there any evidence that large numbers of fathers are available to cover basic child care needs when schools are out of session.

Family realities have changed, but children's needs have not. That is the guts of the problem.

If children are not getting attended to and getting their needs met during the times that they are out of school, they certainly will not be able to function at their full capacity when they are in school.

POLICY IMPLICATION #2: The latchkey phenomenon demands attention not just from educators but equally from public officials, private sector employers, spiritual leaders, and all other sectors who have a stake in a healthy future citizenry and labor force.

The risks to children outlined in the research will not simply affect them in their roles as students, or learners. Children whose self-esteem has been undermined, or who have experienced depression at a young age, or who have become subject to peer pressure to engage in negative behaviors, or who have become parents before they are ready, can also not be expected to develop to their full poten-

tial as contributing and responsible workers, professionals, thinkers, and citizens in the years to come.

Of course, everyone knows inspiring stories of individuals who have suffered immense depredations as children but who grew up to become accomplished athletes, scientists, educators, entrepreneurs. There will always be some in that category, individuals who give back to society much more than was ever given to them as youngsters. But with the latchkey phenomenon, we are talking about millions of children. So even if only a fraction of these children suffer emotional, intellectual, or physical impairment, we are talking at a minimum about hundreds of thousands of casualties.

POLICY IMPLICATION # 3: Support for appropriate supervision for school-age children should be seen as an investment which will reap benefits not only for schools and families but for the society as a whole. Therefore, the costs of such support should not be borne by education budgets alone but shared by other sectors as well.

The case for action on the latchkey issue can be made on the basis of compassion for the children involved. But it can just as easily be made on the basis of cost-benefit analysis: invest in our children now so that we will not need to invest in other areas later on, after the casualties are produced. This is the argument that (outgoing) Senator Paula Hawkins of Florida made in supporting a school-age child care bill on the floor of the U.S. Senate in 1984:

> I regard this bill as a prevention bill. By the expenditure of a very modest amount of federal funds, it alleviates the need for a greater amount of federal assistance for AFDC, foster care, juvenile delinquency programs,and mental health programs.

POLICY IMPLICATION #4: Legislation at the federal and state level is needed permitting communities with high concentrations of low-income families with documented need for school-age child care to expend public funds on "operating costs" for these programs, not merely "start-up costs."

Discussion of costs inevitably leads to the question of whether parents should not bear the full cost of school-age child care options themselves. Certainly that is the present reality in many, perhaps even the majority of communities in which SACC programs have become established.

Unfortunately, it can also be said that areas with high-income families have established SACC programs more rapidly than other areas. Where there are concentrations of dual-earner professionals with reasonably good salaries and high levels of political savvy, parents have known what it took to approach and convince school boards, city councils, private foundations, and others of the worthiness of their cause. And knowing that these parents were prepared to pay the "full freight" for the new services made it easier for elected officials and others to say yes to their requests.

But what about communities with concentrations of low-income families, single parent heads of households, and young parents who may still be trying to get schooling for themselves so they will be able to earn a living wage? Such communities, whether in large urban centers or depressed rural areas, have been considerably slower to move forward on the latchkey issue.

When low-income families are in the minority, it is possible to design sliding-fee structures which accommodate them or develop special sources of scholarship funds from special events, local businesses, or charitable foundations. But when they are in the majority, there is no alternative to public funding of school-age child care.

To date, the Congress has limited use of the federal "dependent care grant" for school-age child care and resource-and-referral (authorized at $20 million per year through 1990, but only $5 million appropriated for each of the first two fiscal years, FY 86 and FY 87) to "start-up costs" and excluded "operating costs." Many states which have allocated their own additional grants for the development of SACC have done the same thing; for instance, New York and Ohio. But outside of a few unique communities that develop resourceful and herculean efforts to raise funds to serve, public appropriations at the federal and state level are going to be the only long term source that will allow communities with high numbers of low-income children to sustain good SACC programs.

POLICY IMPLICATION #5: Initiatives taken to establish or expand the supply of quality SACC programs at the local, regional or state level need to capitalize on the already developed professional expertise and community resources, not re-invent the wheel.

It is well for educational leaders and policymakers to recognize and address the need for SACC programs. In some communities there may be a total lack of previously developed leadership, expertise, and resources in this arena. However, in many communities, that is not the case. To find them may require seeking out organizations and institutions in child care, recreation, public health, mental health, outdoor education, scouting, the fine arts, ethnic and minority cultural centers, and others. Those operating in this field in the past have labored mostly outside the public spotlight and have been dispersed amidst a crazy-quilt patchwork of diverse and under-funded institutions. Yet the track record of such individuals and groups is in many places impressive and should not be overlooked.

POLICY IMPLICATION # 6: Legislation, grants programs, school board resolutions, transportation code revisions, and all other policy initiatives in this arena need to encourage the development of a pluralistic, diverse field in which school-run programs, school-based but privately-run programs, community-based nonprofits, city- and county-run programs, for-profits, and home-based "family day care" arrangements can all be treated equitably and helped to prosper.

The entrance of major institutions, such as schools, into the area of school-age child care should not mean the end of the diversity in the field. In some communities, placing programs in schools and taking them out of church basements may make eminent sense. But in most communities it will be important to recognize that different families, different age groups of children, and children with different after-school interests call for a wide range of responses. Parents and children need to make choices about what option will best meet their particular needs. Support for training and improving the quality of family day care or Park Department programs may be just as valid as large-scale developments in school buildings.

POLICY IMPLICATION #7: When services are developed that are designed to reduce the risks and stresses of self-care, they should never be viewed as a substitute for getting children out of self-care. In addition, such services should always be coupled with communication about the other alternatives.

While attempting to get more children into SACC programs, policymakers will want to make some provision for the kinds of back-up services discussed earlier which may help somewhat to reduce the risks to those children who are going to be on their own. This is certainly worthwhile, as long as these back-up responses are not substituted for the primary response, and as long as they are made available in ways that encourage parents and communities to understand the importance of supervision for those children who are in need of it.

All children, regardless of their child care or home situation, will spend increasing amounts of time on their own as they get older. So on that basis it can certainly be argued that prevention-oriented curricula are sorely needed by children in our society. When such material is presented to children and sent home to parents, however, it needs to be put into its proper context. Parents should be informed of available alternatives to self-care and told that it is best if children only have to rely on their prevention strategies in emergencies, not for daily survival. Parents need to understand that there is a limit to the extent that children below a certain age can be "prepared" for the prevention of harm. And they need to understand that too much time isolated on their own and without constructive activity, is itself subtly harmful to children's development.

Similarly, publicity about "telephone reassurance lines" for children home alone could also publicize the number of the nearest child care information-and-referral office that parents could call to find a SACC program. And these services can use the information they gather from children calling to document the need for more supervised alternatives.

A BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY

Coolsen, Peter; Seligson, Michelle; and Garbarino, James. *When School's Out and Nobody's Home.* 1985 by National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse, Chicago, Illinois.

Baden, Ruth Kramer; Genser, Andrea; Levine, James A.; and Seligson, Michelle. *School-Age Child Care: An Action Manual.* 1982 by Auburn House, Boston, Massachusetts.

Seligson, Michelle; Genser, Andrea; Gannett, Ellen; and Gray, Wendy. *School-Age Child Care: A Policy Report.* 1983 by School-Age Child Care Project of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women.

SACC Newsletter. Published three times a year by School-Age Child Care Project of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, Massachusetts. Fink, Dale B.; Editor.

Long, Lynette; and Long, Thomas. *The Handbook for Latchkey Children and Their Parents.* 1983 by Arbor House, New York, New York.

Bergstrom, Joan M. *School's Out--Now What?* 1984 by Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, California.